APPLE COMICS

Robert Asprin and Ken & Beth Mitchroney

WARP GRAPHICS

Myth conceptions

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WHO'S THE BOSS?

Our Story So Far . . .

In the dimension of Klah, young Skeeve became apprentice to the wizard, Garkin. One day, Garkin summoned a magician from the dimension of Perv, the "demon" Aahz. As a prank, Garkin removed Aahz's powers with a spell. But before Garkin could remove the spell, he was murdered.

So Skeeve became apprentice to Aahz, who, though powerless, still retains his knowledge of magik. Together, they tracked down Isstvan, the mad magician behind Garkin's murder.

Along the way, they visited Deva, site of an interdimensional bazaar, where they met Tananda, the beautiful assassin/magician, and Skeeve adopted Gleep (or was it the other way around?).

Afterwards, Aahz and Skeeve took over Isstvan's former headquarters, an old country inn, to continue Skeeve's education. But Aahz's greed got in the way and after two get-rich-quick schemes backfired, they found themselves facing bankruptcy.

Things began looking up, however, when Skeeve was summoned to apply to become magician to the court of King Rodrick the Fifth of Possiltum. They decided to stage a role reversal — Aahz posing as the apprentice while he teaches Skeeve to act like a powerful sorcerer.

Arriving in Possiltum, Aahz shrewdly gained the favor of King Rodrick's Chancellor, J.R. Grimble, who controls the purse strings in the kingdom. On Grimble's advice, King Rodrick gave Skeeve the job. But Skeeve's first assignment called for *real* magikal skills: stop the army approaching from the north — or die trying.

Even worse, General Badaxe, Commander of the Royal Armies of Possiltum (and Grimble's chief rival), doesn't want competition from magicians — he gave orders to his troops that, even if Aahz and Skeeve succeed, they are not to return to Possiltum alive!

But then Tananda (Tanda to her friends) showed up with a D-hopper. They used it to go to Deva, where, quite by accident, Skeeve recruited a squad of misfits to help them. Returning to Klah, our heroes had their first skirmish and — thanks to Skeeve's magikal skills — actually won!

With a new respect for their foes, the invaders, commanded by "the Brute," began negotiating. Skeeve and the Brute agreed to trade hostages as a sign of good faith. The Brute got Aahz — and immediately executed him!

Enraged, Skeeve used magikal trickery to set the army fighting among itself. The Brute was slain by his own men in the confusion. But Aahz had escaped and had just returned — when the army's Supreme Commander arrived to find out what was holding up the invasion...

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Myth Conceptions™

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WHO'S THE BOSS?

AMAZINGLY ADAPTED BY *BETH & KEN MITCHRONEY*
ARTSY-FARTSY STUFF BY *KEN MITCHRONEY*
WORDS SCULPTED BY *GARY FIELDS*
LAST-MINUTE ASSIST BY MIKE KAZALEH

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO RICHARD JAMES "JAMIE" DUVAL 1958-1988
HIS HELP AND HAPPINESS WILL BE MISSED BY US "BLACK UNICORNS".

SKEEVE OF POSSILTUM!

I THINK WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT THE WAR!

!Z!

I AM SKEEVE. THIS IS MY ASSISTANT, AAHZ. WITH US ARE TANDA, AJAX, GUS, AND BROCKHURST.

AND I AM BIG JULIE, SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE ARMY OF THE EMPIRE.

AND WHO IS THIS?

UH--IT'S GLEEP, OUR DRAGON!

GLEEP GLEEP GLEEP

?

GLEEP GLEEP

Scratch Scratch Scratch

NOW THAT INTRODUCTIONS ARE OUT OF THE WAY, WHY DON'T WE GO INSIDE FOR A CHAT?

BY ORDER OF THE KING OF LAW!

IF LOST PLEASE RETURN TO BARNUM AND BAILEY

LATER, INSIDE...

SINCE IT SEEMS WE'RE ALL CIVILIZED HERE, WHY DON'T WE GET THIS TALK OFF TO A GOOD START?

SNAG!

LIFT!

THAT WINE! WHERE DID YOU GET-- I MEAN--YOU DIDN'T PUT ANY...

I'M PLAYING THIS ROUND STRAIGHT!

FOR THE LAST TIME, THERE DOESN'T HAVE TO *BE* A WAR. YOU DON'T *HAVE* TO ATTACK POSSILTUM. WE DON'T *CARE* WHAT ELSE YOU DO, SO LONG AS YOU LEAVE *POSSILTUM* ALONE!

AH'M SORRY, BUT I CAN'T DO IT. WE'VE *GOT* TO KEEP *ADVANCING*, YOU KNOW? THAT'S WHAT ARMIES DO!

COULDN'T YOU ADVANCE IN ANOTHER DIRECTION FOR A WHILE?

AIE! WHAT DO YOU THINK I *GOT* HERE, *GENIUSES*? THESE ARE *SOLDIERS!* THEY MOVE IN *STRAIGHT LINES*-- KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

DO THEY HAVE TO MOVE SO *VIGOROUSLY*? THEY DON'T LEAVE MUCH BEHIND.

PAT PAT

WHAT CAN I SAY? THEY'RE GOOD BOYS. THEY DO THEIR JOB. SOMETIMES THEY GET A *LITTLE* CARRIED AWAY, LIKE THE BRUTE.

SAY, UM, JULIE--

THAT'S "*BIG* JULIE"!

BIG JULIE! ABOUT THE BRUTE...

...UM-- HE WAS-- WELL-- I WANTED-- TO AAH...

DON'T MENTION IT! YOU WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH? YOU DID ME A *FAVOR*!

I DID?

I'D HEAT UP A GROUND BRUTE

I WAS GETTING A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT THE BRUTE-- YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? HE WAS GETTING A LITTLE TOO AMBITIOUS.

STILL-- THAT'S A *BAD* WAY TO GO. HACKED APART BY YOUR OWN MEN. I WOULDN'T WANT THAT TO HAPPEN TO *ME!*

BJ

BLOOOSH

YOU SHOULD HAVE FED HIM TO THE DRAGONS!

THE BRUTE? FED TO THE DRAGONS?

BUT *WHY?*

BECAUSE THEN HE COULD HAVE BEEN

"ET, TOO!"

HAR HAR HAR HAR

HAW HAW

HAW HAW HAW

HE'S STRANGE. WHAT'S A NICE BOY LIKE YOU DOING HANGING AROUND WITH STRANGE PEOPLE?

GIGGLE HAW! SNICKER HEE HEE. HAW HAW HAW

IT'S THE WAR. YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT STRANGE BEDFELLOWS.

HUMMMM--

YOU SEEM TO BE DOIN' ALL RIGHT FOR YOURSELF!

YOU WANT I SHOULD CLEAN UP HIS ACT, BOSS?

SEE!! THAT'S WHAT I MEAN. THIS IS NO WAY TO LEARN WARFARE!

HEE HEE SNORK HEE HAW HAW ET TOO!

TELL YOU WHAT. WHY DON'T YOU LET ME FIX YOU UP WITH A JOB, HEY? WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT?

WHAT PAY SCALE?

ZLOOT!

SORRY, BIG JULIE, BUT WE'VE ALREADY GOT A JOB--DEFENDING POSSILTUM. I APPRECIATE YOUR OFFER, BUT I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE A JOB UNFINISHED.

SHOVE

WHAT HAVE I BEEN *TELLING* YOU? ALL THE *GOOD* MATERIAL HAS BEEN *TAKEN* ALREADY. *WHY* CAN'T YOU BRING ME RECRUITS LIKE *THIS*, EH?

BIG JULIE, ABOUT DEFENDING POSSILTUM. COULDN'T YOU FIND *ANOTHER* KINGDOM SOMEWHERE TO ATTACK? WE REALLY DON'T *WANT* TO HAVE TO FIGHT YOU.

YOU DON'T WANT TO FIGHT? YOU THINK I WANT TO FIGHT? YOU THINK I *LIKE* DOING THIS FOR A LIVING? YOU THINK MY *BOYS* LIKE KILLING AND CONQUERING ALL THE TIME?

BJ

WELL--

WHAT KIND OF DINGBAT *WANTS* TO FIGHT? DO I LOOK *CRAZY*? DO MY *BOYS* LOOK CRAZY?

EVERYBODY THINKS WE GOT SOME KIND OF WEIRD *DRIVE* THAT KEEPS US GOING. THEY THINK THAT ALL WE WANT TO DO IN THE *WHOLE WORLD* IS MARCH AROUND IN SWEATY ARMOR AND SHARPEN OUR SWORDS ON OTHER PEOPLE'S HELMETS.

THAT'S WHAT *YOU* THINK, *TOO*, ISN'T IT? EH? *ISN'T IT!?!*

YES! THAT'S WHAT I THINK!!

WELL, YOU'RE WRONG BECAUSE--

THAT'S WHAT I THINK BECAUSE IF YOU *DIDN'T* LIKE DOING IT, YOU *WOULDN'T* DO IT!

JUST LIKE *THAT*. JUST *STOP* AND *WALK* AWAY!

HE THINKS IT'S *EASY*. DO YOU HEAR *THAT*?

HEE HEE!

HOO HOO!

ANY OF YOU WHO DON'T LIKE TO FIGHT, JUST *STOP*, EH? JUST LIKE THAT! HA HA HA HA!

Ooo

I DON'T UNDERSTAND! IF *YOU* DON'T WANT TO FIGHT, AND *WE* DON'T WANT TO FIGHT, WHAT ARE WE *DOING* HERE!?

YOU EVER HEAR OF *LOAN SHARKS*? YOU KNOW ABOUT ORGANIZED CRIME?

ORGANIZED CRIME?

IT'S LIKE GOVERNMENT, KID--ONLY MORE EFFECTIVE.

YOU BETTER *BELIEVE* IT'S "MORE EFFECTIVE"! *THAT'S* WHAT WE'RE DOING HERE!

?

ME AND THE BOYS, WE GOT A LIST OF GAMBLING DEBTS LIKE YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE! WE'RE KINDA WORKING IT OFF, PAYING 'EM BACK IN LAND, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

YOU HAVEN'T ANSWERED MY QUESTION. WHY DON'T YOU JUST QUIT?

QUIT? YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING!

IF I QUIT BEFORE I'M PAID UP, THEY BREAK MY LEG--YOU KNOW.

IT'S THE SAME WITH THE BOYS HERE.

AND YOU OUGHT TO SEE THE *COLLECTION AGENT* THEY USE! KID, YOU MIGHT BE A FAIR MAGICIAN WHERE *YOU* COME FROM, BUT *THIS*--BELIEVE ME--YOU *DON'T* WANT TO SEE!

THAT'S WHY IT'S REALLY GONNA BREAK MY HEART TO KILL YOU, YA KNOW?

RAF!

WELL, YOU DON'T HAVE TO--KILL ME!?!

THAT'S RIGHT. I *KNEW* YOU'D UNDERSTAND. A JOB'S A *JOB*, EVEN WHEN YOU *HATE* IT.

?!?

WHOA! HOLD IT! AREN'T YOU OVERLOOKING SOMETHING, JULES?

THAT'S "BIG JULIE".

I DON'T CARE IF HE CALLS HIMSELF THE *EASTER BUNNY*! HE'S STILL OVERLOOKING SOMETHING!

WHAT'S THAT?

US! ASIDE FROM THE MINOR DETAIL THAT SKEEVE HERE'S A MAGICIAN AND NOT THAT EASY TO KILL, HE'S GOT FRIENDS. WHAT DO YOU THINK WE'LL BE DOING WHILE YOU MAKE A TRY FOR OUR LEADER?

GRRR

AS A MATTER OF FACT, I EXPECT YOU TO BE DYING RIGHT ALONG WITH YOUR LEADER. THAT IS, UNLESS YOU'RE *REALLY* GOOD AT RUNNING!

RUNNING FROM *WHAT?* I *STILL* THINK YOU'RE OVERLOOKING SOMETHING. BY MY COUNT, WE'VE GOT YOU OUTNUMBERED. EVEN IF YOU WERE ARMED.

NOW, I'M ONLY GONNA SAY THIS ONCE, SO ALLA YOU LISTEN CLOSE. BIG JULIE DIDN'T GET WHERE HE IS TODAY BY OVER-LOOKING NOTHIN'. YOU THINK I'M OUT-NUMBERED? WELL MAYBE YOU JUST BETTER COUNT AGAIN!

FLOOPH!

I--UM-- THOUGHT WAR COUNCILS WERE SUPPOSED TO BE OFF LIMITS FOR COMBAT.

I ALSO DIDN'T GET WHERE I AM TODAY BY PLAYING FAIR!

YOU KNOW, FOR A GUY WHO DOESN'T WANT TO FIGHT, YOU RUN A PRETTY NASTY WAR!

WHAT CAN I SAY? IT'S A JOB. BELIEVE ME, IF THERE WAS ANY OTHER WAY, I'D TAKE IT. BUT AS IT IS--

HOW MUCH TIME DO WE HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WAY?

BUF!

YOU DON'T!

AND WE DON'T NEED ANY!

WHAT'S *THAT* SUPPOSED TO MEAN? AND WHERE DID THIS LITTLE *BLUE* FELLA COME FROM, EH?

THIS IS A *GREMLIN*. AND I THINK HE'S GOT THE ANSWER TO OUR PROBLEMS--*ALL* OUR PROBLEMS--YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

WHAT *DOES* HE MEAN?

BIG JULIE, WHAT COULD THOSE LOAN SHARKS OF YOURS DO IF YOU AND YOUR ARMY SIMPLY *DISAPPEARED*?!

POOOF

AND SO...

WELL, BOSS, I GUESS THIS IS IT. THANKS FOR EVERY-THING!

IT'S BEEN A REAL PLEASURE WORKING FOR YOU. THE MONEY'S NICE, BUT THE WAY I FIGURE IT, BERFERT AND I OWE YOU A LITTLE EXTRA FOR GET-TING US OUT OF THAT SLOP CHUTE. ANYTIME YOU NEED A FAVOR, LOOK US UP!

CRUNCH

YOUNGSTER, I MOVE AROUND A LOT, SO I'M NOT THAT EASY TO TRACK. IF YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF IN A SPOT WHERE YOU THINK I CAN LEND A HAND, JES' SEND A MESSAGE TO THE BAZAAR AND I'LL BE ALONG SHORTLY.

I DIDN'T THINK YOU VISITED THE BAZAAR THAT OFTEN.

NORMALLY, I DON'T. BUT I *WILL* NOW-- JEST IN CASE!

I SHOULDN'T TAKE THIS, BUT A GIRL'S GOTTA EAT!

YOU EARNED IT!

I MEANT EVER!

SURE! YOU WON'T GET RID OF ME THAT EASILY! SAY GOODBYE TO AAHZ FOR ME!

WELL, I GUESS WE'LL BE GOING. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, HANDSOME!

YOU WILL BE COMING BACK?

I DON'T THINK SO. IF GRIMBLE SAW US TOGETHER--

SAY "GOOD-BYE" TO HIM YOURSELF!

THERE YOU ARE! WHERE'S THE GREMLIN? I THOUGHT YOU TWO WERE TALKING.

WE WERE. I DON'T UNDERSTAND. HE WAS HERE A MINUTE AGO!

IT'S AS IF HE DIDN'T EXIST, ISN'T IT, AAHZ?

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

THEY WERE A GOOD TEAM, KID. NOW PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER. TRIUMPHANT GENERALS DON'T HAVE SLOW LEAKS IN THE VICINITY OF THEIR EYES. IT'S BAD FOR THE IMAGE.
SNIF SNIF

the Triumphant Return

BADAXE LOOKS FURIOUS! I WONDER WHY HIS SOLDIERS DIDN'T STOP US ON THE WAY BACK. I THOUGHT THEY HAD ORDERS?!

LORD MAGICIAN! KNOW THAT THE CHEERS OF THE GRATEFUL CITIZENS OF POSSILTUM ONLY ECHO MY OWN FEELINGS FOR THIS SERVICE YOU HAVE DONE US! NEWS OF YOUR VICTORY HAS SPREAD BEFORE YOU! ALREADY OUR HISTORIANS ARE RECORDING THE DETAILS OF YOUR TRIUMPH!

KING

YEAH

--AS MUCH AS IS KNOWN. WHILE WE DO NOT PRETEND TO COMPREHEND THE WORKINGS OF YOUR POWERS, THE RESULTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES! A MIGHTY ARMY OF INVINCIBLE WARRIORS VANISHED INTO THIN AIR! ONLY THEIR ARBOR AND SIEGE MACHINES LITTERING THE EMPTY BATTLEFIELD MARK THEIR PASSING.

YEAH HOORAY YE-HAW

HIP HIP HOORAY

YA-HOO

WOW

THE WAR IS WON! THE THREAT TO POSSILTUM IS ENDED FOREVER!

YIPPEE HA-RAH

YEAH WA-HOO

I'VE GOT TO TALK TO YOU TWO!

SHOULDN'T WE GO INSIDE WHERE IT'S QUIETER? THE CROWD--

YA-HOO!

WE'LL TALK HERE!

WOW

YEAH

SNAP!

JUST A MOMENT! WHAT'S GOING ON?--

GENERAL! I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET THE NEWEST CITIZEN OF POSSILTUM!

GENERAL BADAXE, MEET BIG JULIE. BIG JULIE, HUGH BADAXE!

NICE TO MEET YOU! THE BOY HERE, HE'S BEEN TELLIN' ME ALL ABOUT YOU!

YOU! BUT YOU'RE-- YOU'RE--

I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND, GENERAL, BUT I'VE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF OFFERING BIG JULIE A JOB-- AS YOUR *MILITARY CONSULTANT!*

WHAT'S THE MATTER?--DON'T YOU THINK I CAN DO IT?

IT'S NOT THAT--IT'S JUST-- WELL--

ONE THING WE NEGLECTED TO MENTION IS BIG JULIE HERE IS RETIRING FROM ACTIVE DUTY!

HE'S MORE THAN WILLING TO LEAVE THE RUNNING OF POSSILTUM'S ARMY TO YOU-- AND AGREES TO GIVE ADVICE ONLY WHEN ASKED!

THAT'S *RIGHT!* I JUST WANNA SIT IN THE SUN--DRINK A LITTLE WINE-- PAT A FEW BOTTOMS, MAYBE-- YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

BUT THE KING--

DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BOTHERED WITH IT AT ALL-- UNLESS YOU DEEM IT NECESSARY TO TELL HIM WHERE YOUR NEW BATTLE PLANS ARE COMING FROM!

--YOU SURE YOU'D BE HAPPY WITH THINGS THAT WAY, JULIE?

POSITIVE! I DON'T WANT NO GLORY, NO RESPONSIBILITY, AND NO CREDIT! I HAD TOO MUCH OF THAT WHEN I WAS WORKIN' FOR THE EMPIRE, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? ME AND THE BOYS TALKED IT OVER, AND WE DECIDED--

THE BOYS?!

THAT'S ANOTHER THING, GENERAL. BIG JULIE ISN'T THE ONLY NEW ADDITION TO POSSILTUM'S CITIZENRY!

YOU MEAN YOU--

HAPPY POSSILTUM CITIZENS ALL, GENERAL! I THINK YOU'LL FIND THAT IF YOU SHOULD EVER HAVE TO DRAFT AN ARMY, THESE NEW CITIZENS WILL TRAIN A LOT FASTER THAN YOUR AVERAGE PLOW PUSHER.

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

BIG JULIE! YOU AND YOUR--ER-- BOYS ARE *MORE* THAN WELCOME TO SETTLE HERE! LET ME BE ONE OF THE FIRST TO CONGRATULATE YOU ON YOUR NEW CITIZENSHIP!

JUST A MOMENT! THERE'S ONE MINOR FLAW IN YOUR PLANS!

IT'S *MY* INTENTION TO ADVISE THE KING TO *DISBAND POSSILTUM'S ARMY!*

WHAT!?!

LET ME HANDLE THIS, GENERAL! GRIMBLE, *WHAT* WOULD YOU WANT TO DO A *FOOL* THING LIKE *THAT* FOR?

WHY, BECAUSE OF THE *MAGICIAN*, OF COURSE! YOU'VE DEMONSTRATED HE IS *QUITE* CAPABLE OF DEFENDING THE KINGDOM WITHOUT THE AID OF AN ARMY, SO I SEE NO REASON WHY WE SHOULD *CONTINUE* TO BEAR THE COST OF *MAINTAINING* ONE!

NONSENSE! DO YOU THINK THE GREAT SKEEVE HAS NOTHING BETTER TO DO WITH HIS TIME BUT GUARD YOUR BRIDGES?

DO YOU WANT TO TIE UP YOUR HIGH-COST MAGICIAN DOING THE JOB A LOW-COST SOLDIER COULD DO?

WELL--

BESIDES, SKEEVE WILL BE SPENDING CONSIDERABLE TIME ON THE ROAD FURTHERING HIS STUDIES-- WHICH WILL OF *COURSE* INCREASE HIS VALUE TO POSSILTUM. *WHO* WILL GUARD YOUR KINGDOM WHILE HE'S AWAY, IF NOT THE ARMY?

BUT THE COST IS--

IF *ANYTHING*, I SHOULD THINK YOU'D WANT TO *EXPAND* YOUR ARMY NOW THAT YOUR BORDERS HAVE INCREASED IN SIZE!

WHAT'S *THAT*-- WHAT *ABOUT* OUR BORDERS?

I THOUGHT IT WAS *OBVIOUS*. ALL THESE NEW CITIZENS HAVE TO SETTLE *SOMEWHERE*-- AND THERE'S A LOT OF LAND UP FOR GRABS JUST NORTH OF HERE-- COMPLETELY UNGUARDED FOR THE MOMENT. POSSILTUM WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE TO FIGHT FOR IT-- JUST *MOVE IN AND SETTLE*. THAT IS, *PROVIDED* YOU HAVE A STRONG ENOUGH ARMY TO HOLD IT ONCE YOU'VE GOT IT!

THEN AGAIN-- THERE'S ALL THE EXTRA *TAX MONEY* THE NEW CITIZENS AND LAND WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THE EXCHEQUER!

KA-CHING

KA-CHING

BIG JULIE! I'D LIKE TO WELCOME YOU AND YOUR MEN TO POSSILTUM!

?

I'M WELCOMING HIM *FIRST*! HE'S *MY* ADVISOR!

OF COURSE, GENERAL! I'LL JUST WAIT HERE UNTIL YOU'RE THROUGH. THERE ARE A FEW THINGS I WANT TO DISCUSS WITH OUR NEW CITIZENS!

WHILE YOU'RE WAITING, GRIMBLE, THERE ARE A FEW THINGS *WE* HAVE TO DISCUSS WITH *YOU*!

SUCH AS WHAT?

SUCH AS THE COURT MAGICIAN'S PAY!

OF COURSE! AS SOON AS WE'RE DONE HERE, WE'LL GO INSIDE AND I'LL PAY HIM HIS FIRST MONTH'S WAGES.

ACTUALLY WHAT WE WANTED TO DISCUSS WAS AN INCREASE!

YOU MEAN A BONUS, DON'T YOU? I'M SURE WE CAN WORK SOMETHING OUT, CONSIDERING--

I MEAN AN INCREASE! C'MON, GRIMBLE! THE KINGDOM'S BIGGER NOW. THAT MEANS THE MAGICIAN'S JOB IS BIGGER AND DESERVES MORE PAY!

I'M NOT SURE I CAN APPROVE THAT--

WITH THE INCREASE OF YOUR TAX BASE, I FIGURE YOU CAN AFFORD--

NOW LET'S BE CAREFUL. OUR OVERHEAD HAS GONE UP RIGHT ALONG WITH THAT INCREASE. IN FACT, I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF--

C'MON, GLEEP! LET'S GO SEE BUTTERCUP! I THINK THEY'RE GOING TO BE BUSY FOR A WHILE!

THAT AFTERNOON IN THE PALACE...

PING!

COME HERE!

HOP!

HEY, KID! HAVE YOU GOT A CORKSCREW?

CLANKITY-CLANKITY-CLANK

WHAT'S A CORKSCREW?

FLOONK!

POOP

POP

AAAH! TERRIFIC BOUQUET!

AAHZ! I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.

FIRST, COULD YOU ANSWER A QUESTION?

WHY IS THAT BRAZIER FOLLOWING YOU AROUND THE ROOM?

UM--THAT'S WHAT I WAS GOING TO SHOW YOU. I'VE FIGURED OUT HOW TO GET THE BRAZIER TO COME TO ME ALL BY ITSELF--NO LEVITATION OR ANYTHING!

SWELL. NOW, CAN YOU MAKE IT STOP?

CLANK CLANK CLANK

UM-- I DON'T KNOW.

SAY, AAHZ, COULD YOU POUR ME SOME OF THAT WINE?

THAT'S RIGHT.

WE'RE IN PRIVATE, RIGHT KID?

WELL, THEN--

IF YOU INSIST!

GET YOUR OWN WINE, APPRENTICE!

BUNT!

PICK!

THINK YOU'RE PRETTY SMART, DON'T YOU? WELL, I GUESS YOU ARE--FOR AN AMATEUR!

A SALARIED PROFESSIONAL!

FOR A *PROFESSIONAL*, YOU'VE GOT A LOT TO LEARN, BUT THAT CAN WAIT FOR ANOTHER DAY. YOU MIGHT AS WELL RELAX AND ENJOY YOURSELF WHILE YOU CAN!

WAIT A MINUTE! YOU PUSHED ME INTO THIS COURT MAGICIAN JOB BECAUSE IT'S SO EASY! SO NOTHING CAN GO WRONG--NOTHING *SERIOUS*, RIGHT?

?

JUST KEEP THINKING THAT! IT'LL HELP YOU SLEEP NIGHTS! BUT THERE *ARE* A FEW THINGS YOU OVERLOOKED!

SUCH AS?

SUCH AS GUS, AJAX, AND BROCKHURST. YOU SENT THEM BACK TO DEVA WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS. TANDA WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT, BUT THE OTHER THREE WILL TALK!

YOU THINK THEY'LL TALK?

IS A FROG'S BEHIND WATERTIGHT?

LET'S SEE--

CUT THE COMEDY, KID. WITH MONEY IN THEIR POCKETS, FRESH FROM A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS--OF *COURSE* THEY'LL TALK!

WHAT'S MORE, THEY'LL EMBELLISH IT A LITTLE MORE WITH EACH TELLING UNTIL IT SOUNDS LIKE THEY'RE THE GREATEST FIGHTERS EVER TO SPIT TEETH, AND YOU'RE THE GREATEST TACTICIAN SINCE GRONK!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?

NOTHING AT ALL -- EXCEPT NOW THE WORD WILL BE OUT AS TO WHO YOU ARE, WHERE YOU ARE, AND WHAT YOU ARE -- AND THAT YOU'RE FOR HIRE AND THAT YOU SUBCONTRACT. THEY *NOTICE* THINGS LIKE THAT AT THE *BAZAAR!*

SO WE SUDDENLY GET A LOT OF STRANGE PEOPLE DROPPING IN TO OFFER JOBS OR LOOK FOR WORK? I'LL JUST GET A LOT OF PRACTICE SAYING "NO". WHO KNOWS -- IT MIGHT IMPROVE MY STATUS IF IT'S KNOWN I CONSULT WITH STRANGE BEINGS FROM OTHER WORLDS!

OF COURSE, THERE'S THE CHANCE SOMEONE WILL HEAR THAT THE OTHER SIDE IS THINKING OF HIRING YOU AND DECIDE TO *REMOVE* YOU FROM THE *ROSTER* -- OR SOME YOUNG HOTSHOT WILL WANT TO MAKE A NAME FOR HIMSELF BY TAKING ON THIS UNBEATABLE MAGICIAN EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT.

THEN THERE'S GRIMBLE AND BADAXE. THE ONLY WAY *THOSE* TWO WOULD WORK TOGETHER IS AGAINST A COMMON FOE! AND IN MY ESTIMATION, THE BEST CANDIDATE FOR "COMMON FOE" IS *YOU!*

UNTIL YOU HIT THE SCENE, THEY WERE IN A TWO-WAY POWER STRUGGLE FOR THE KING'S EAR. THEN YOU CAME ALONG, SAVED THE KINGDOM, INCREASED THE POPULATION, EXPANDED THE BORDERS, AND ADDED TO THE TAX BASE. YOU'RE THE MOST POPULAR AND INFLUENTIAL PERSON IN THE KING'S COURT!

OH!

I DON'T THINK GRIMBLE AND BADAXE ARE GOING TO SIGH AND ACCEPT THAT. I THINK THEY'LL ATTACK ANYTHING YOU SAY OR DO MILITARILY AND MOMENTARILY -- AND THAT'S A TOUGH ONE-TWO PUNCH TO COUNTER.

CLANK CLANK CLANK!

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THERE'S THE PEOPLE BIG JULIE AND HIS MEN OWE MONEY TO. I WONDER HOW LONG IT WILL BE BEFORE THEY START NOSING AROUND LOOKING FOR AN EXPLANATION AS TO WHAT HAPPENED TO AN ENTIRE ARMY? MORE IMPORTANT, I WONDER WHO THEY'LL BE LOOKING FOR BY *NAME* TO PROVIDE THEM WITH THE EXPLANATION?

"F.H.D." Approved

AAHZ! DO YOU MIND IF I HAVE A LITTLE MORE OF THAT WINE?

HELP YOURSELF, KID! THERE'S LOTS!

AAHZ? DO YOU THINK THE FALL FROM UP HERE WOULD KILL ME?

SAVE IT FOR MY *BIRTH*-DAY, HUH, KID?

FINITO!